

309 Yoakum Pkwy #601

Alexandria, VA 22304

June 26, 1985

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm back at work today after spending two days at home with a post-vacation cold. We certainly enjoyed seeing Mary, Mike, and Diane for a few days. I think they had a good time and hope they will visit again whenever possible.

We enjoyed our trip to Egypt very much. Vickie and I had been there in 1975 on a tour and I was there during a port visit in 1982. Few people can understand why one would want to revisit Egypt, but we have found that prior experience and more knowledge about a place enable one to appreciate it even more. Visible Egyptian history starts around 3000 BC and is revealed in ancient Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Early Christian, and Moslem remains. Prior preparation is essential to appreciating the sites.

We flew to JFK from National on 9 Jun and transferred to the 747 for a non-stop to Athens. We arrived in Cairo the next afternoon after a plane change in Athens. We were on a TWA tour. Most of the group arrived with us and assembled in the airport where we were met by our tour director and transported to the Holiday Inn near the pyramids which are about 20 minutes from downtown Cairo. We felt well-rested and set out about 6 PM for a walk around the pyramids. On the way we were continually pestered by men who insisted we ride a camel, horse, or donkey; employ

them as guides; climb the pyramids (illegal), etc. At 6:30 PM these people disappeared (union rules ?) and we were able to enjoy the sunset undisturbed.

Our sightseeing began on Tuesday with a bus ride to Saqqara, the graveyard of the earliest ancient Egyptians. We visited some tombs and viewed the oldest pyramid in Egypt. The ancient capital of Egypt, Memphis, is nearby and under many feet of soil deposited by the Nile. Excavations are awaiting a plan to displace the modern inhabitants. The government is building massive new housing but the birthrate is so high that these efforts may be futile. Most people in the countryside live under crumbling mud-brick roofs in the dirt with their animals. I'm not sure it's something Mom would like to see! That afternoon we skipped the tour of the great pyramids (which we had seen before) and took a taxi into town for a stroll along the Nile. We walked from the Hilton down to the Meridien, the hotel we stayed at during our previous visit. We enjoyed a terrific buffet (mostly salads) while seated with a good view of the river.

The next day was full of tours. Due to the heat (90's) and extreme dryness, we carried a canteen of bottled water everywhere and were glad we did. A major stop was at the Citadel, a massive enclosure built by Saladin about 1100 AD. We visited the principal mosque of Cairo which is also very ancient. In the afternoon we visited the Cairo Museum to see the objects from King Tutankamen's (Tut) tomb. At 4:30 AM the next morning we left the hotel for the one hour flight to Luxor, the town near the Valley of the Kings where King Tut's and many other royal tombs

are located. It was much warmer in "upper" Egypt; over 100 degrees. Again we toured all day and some members were forced to drop out due to the long day, the heat, and considerable walking. Finally we boarded our cruise ship for the sail down the Nile.

The ship had four levels with the upper one including an indoor lounge, a covered deck area, and a swimming pool area. There were Italian and British tour groups in addition to ours. The cruise was a real treat. We generally sat in the covered deck area drinking "Stella" beer and watching the banks of the Nile slide by. It was a three day cruise to Aswan during which we went ashore to see three well-preserved temples from the Greco-Roman period. In Aswan we saw the High Dam, another temple, and other sights. In the evening we boarded the night train to Cairo. Our first class sleeping compartments were very comfortable. There was a lounge car for drinks and dinner was served in the room before the bunks were let down. The ride was not very smooth but we were able to sleep quite well.

Arriving back in Cairo in the morning, Vickie and I returned to the Cairo Museum to see some other exhibits. When we reached our hotel near the airport in the late afternoon our tour director informed us of the one day delay. This did not disturb us in the least and we planned our extra day in Cairo.

I wanted to visit two sights: the Islamic Museum and the Gayer-Anderson House, now a museum. We took a taxi to the Islamic Museum and afterward decided to walk to the house. It is not easy to stroll through Cairo without some practice as the streets are not labeled in English, sidewalks are poor or non-existent, and the traffic is incredible. Finally we got on the trolley because the

distance appeared a little too far to walk in the hot sun. On the trolley we were surrounded by children interested in our appearance and desirous of talking to us. All students learn English. The youngest can say 'Hello' and 'What is your name'. Older students can converse quite well.

The day was a special holiday marking the end of Ramadan, a month of fasting from 3:30 AM to 6:30 PM. By the end of this month (which shifts because it is based on the lunar calendar) the religious Egyptians are really dragging. The first day of the three day holiday is very special with everyone dressed in their best clothes for visits to friends and relatives. It was a great day to be on foot because we were deluged with friendly waves, salutations, and offers of assistance. The house we visited was built during the 1500's and furnished by an Englishman during the 1930's in the original authentic style. I gave our guide a dollar so he insisted on ordering mint tea for us after the visit.

It is not easy to visit Egypt but we already have in mind what we want to see next time.

Love,
Jim & Vickie